

The Question of the Reception of BEM in the Orthodox Church in the Light of its Ecumenical Commitment

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A FEW INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS on points raised by the title of this paper are necessary. First, I took the liberty of changing my own original title by using the singular "Orthodox Church" rather than the plural "Orthodox Churches," in order to underscore the unity of the Orthodox Church. While the plural certainly carries its own legitimacy, ecumenical discourse today seems increasingly to favor the plural, expressing an ecclesiological ambiguity which needs to be clarified. I discuss this matter in the last section of this paper.

Secondly, by reception I do not signify that ecclesial process through which the Orthodox Church has received the authoritative decrees of Ecumenical Synods or continues to receive today the decisions of the canonical synods of Orthodox bishops. Although this process itself is in some ways instructive to the question at hand, clearly BEM neither presupposes nor claims that kind of ecclesial authority. By reception I mean rather the general process of any tradition engaging, either from within or from without, new ideas, acts or practices, which are consciously or unconsciously assessed, and then in various ways accepted or rejected by the living tradition of a people. The most authentic kind of reception involves an active response, a critical reaction to something on the basis of a given tradition's own values. From the beginning of the history of salvation the people of God have inevitably been involved in such a broad, dynamic process regarding laws, customs, forms of worship, teaching, institutions and even the biblical canons—all of which have been subject to variety, revision and evaluation according to the mind of the people of God guided by the Holy Spirit. Critical

reception is decisive to authentic renewal: it is the power of a tradition to maintain itself as a living tradition and thereby to be able effectively to witness to its own deepest insights and truths.

And thirdly, one might ask in what way(s) the reception of BEM is a question. The Vancouver Assembly (1983) stated that the Lima text "is at one and the same time a challenge and an opportunity for the churches."¹ Many theologians as well have already written about the new ecumenical moment reached through the publication of BEM by virtue of half a century of patient labor within the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. The bold hope of the Faith and Order Commission, according to J. M. R. Tillard, is "to make possible a new and universal Reformation embracing all the Christian traditions—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, as well as Protestant."² BEM is indeed a profound question to the divided churches, both stimulating and perplexing, a question which in future years will probe the depth of their ecumenical commitment at the heart of which is the willingness to walk together on the difficult road to unity.

However, in another way the churches have the right to question the question as a normal part of the reception process. That the BEM document has raised the issue of continuing membership in the World Council for some churches is not surprising. During the long process of reception, unless the goal of unity is set aside as unreachable, BEM will ultimately raise the same issue for all the member churches. The reception of BEM in the Orthodox Churches, although having raised no concerns about continuing membership, is nevertheless a matter of question for many complex reasons. One reason is the preliminary confusion over the meaning of reception. Other reasons have to do with the spiritual readiness, the theological vision, and the canonical ecclesiology of the Orthodox Churches.

As a major ecumenical document BEM does obviously not exist in a vacuum but bears the hopes and ambiguities of the whole ecumenical movement. Its reception in the Orthodox Church is intimately related to the ongoing problematic nature of the Orthodox membership in the World Council—with or without BEM—and specifically its own self-understanding of being the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, its place in the World Council, and its joys and frustrations arising from ecumenical engagement. As an ecumenical event BEM raises anew the issue of the relationship of the Orthodox Church to the World

¹ David Gill, ed., *Gathered for Life Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva-Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 45

² J. M. R. Tillard, "BEM The Call for a Judgment upon the Churches and the Ecumenical Movement," *Mid-Stream* 23, no. 3 (1984) 237

Council. My purpose in this paper is to examine some of the most important of the above reasons bearing on the reception of BEM in the Orthodox Churches in three closely related perspectives—spiritual, theological, and ecclesiological. I do so with the prayerful hope that the two-way questions of the reception process of BEM will cause the Orthodox Church both to renew and to deepen its ecumenical commitment in a hopeful and realistic way.

The Spiritual Challenge

The spiritual challenge raised by BEM has several dimensions such as the contents of BEM which have to do with Christian life and not merely with abstract theology, the implications of BEM for the mutual relations between the churches, and the spiritual readiness of any church seriously determining that church's quality of response to BEM. All these dimensions find their focus in the ecumenical reality which we have called a "fellowship of churches." What is the nature and depth of this fellowship? Has this fellowship matured to a point in which it is able to deal positively with BEM that the fellowship might grow deeper and stronger? Some broader remarks about this fellowship might be helpful.

The 1920 Patriarchal Encyclical, the spiritual breath of the ecumenical movement, challenged all the churches, despite their doctrinal differences, to join in a fellowship (*koinonia*)³ of churches which, on the one hand, would renounce all distrust, bitterness, polemics and proselytism, and, on the other hand, would allow themselves to be rekindled by Christ's love so that the divided churches "should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, and as being a part of the household of Christ"⁴ (cf. Eph 2.19). Thanks be to God that, beyond anyone's expectation, the hope of the Patriarchal Encyclical, and others as well, have been fulfilled in just over fifty years of ecumenical labor through the one ecumenical movement chiefly represented by the World Council of Churches. The dream of faith is now a reality: "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." This basis of the World Council is not only a constitutional declaration but also a spiritual affirmation. Membership in the World Council is not merely an act of ecclesiastical formality but above all a spiritual act—an act of ecclesial conscience informed by the Holy Spirit.

³ C. G. Patelos, ed., *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva, 1978), p. 40

⁴ Ibid., p. 41

But what is the nature of this fellowship? A fellowship is an association of people with common interests and goals, a partnership of equals committed to free and respectful dialogue, a community of friends engaged in living contact—talking, listening, learning, working and growing together in a spirit of mutual trust and love. The heart of this fellowship of churches is the confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To confess Christ is a response to what he has already done for us. He has loved us first. He has shed his blood on the cross for our forgiveness. He has risen from the dead to renew us by his divine power. He has sealed us with the Spirit of adoption making us sharers of the new covenant. We confess and receive him as Lord because he has already received us as co-heirs of his kingdom. Our common faith in Christ leads us to embrace one another as he has already embraced us. The words of Saint Paul to Jewish and Gentile Christians in the first century ring with awesome ecumenical relevance to the separated churches today: “Therefore, receive (*proslambanete*) one another just as (*kathos kai*) Christ has received (*proselabeto*) you to the glory of God”⁵ (Rom 15.7).

Given the nature of our fellowship of churches, one might then ask to what degree has this fellowship matured in the ecumenical span of three generations? That is the spiritual challenge of BEM which must now be faced squarely because BEM is the result of an official charge of the member churches to the Faith and Order Commission working on their behalf. Let us seek to clear away all unnecessary confusions. BEM is presented to the churches for reception claiming neither exhaustiveness nor infallibility. BEM bears no ecclesial value except that which the member churches themselves may discover in one another through the process of reception. Reception at this early stage of the process by no means implies an official ecclesiastical act of an ultimate nature. The Vancouver Assembly clearly distinguished between, on the one hand, the “official response” of the churches “intended to initiate a process of study and communication” in each church as a body (rather than as individual or groups of individual theologians or church leaders), and, on the other hand, the long-range process of reception according to each church’s own tradition which “will require much time and wide participation at various levels of the church.”⁶ Any official ecclesiastical act pertaining to BEM or aspects thereof might be taken only at the end of this spiritual pilgrimage which could take considerable time.

⁵ See also Ulrich Kuhn, “Reception—An Imperative and an Opportunity,” *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ed., Max Thurian (Geneva, 1983), p. 171

⁶ *Gathered for Life*, pp. 46-47

Thus the question of the reception of BEM is a question of study, reflection, discussion, reaction and assimilation in the context of the spiritual and ecclesial freedom of the churches. The only authority of BEM is that it is not "their" text but "our" text—a common text of our fellowship. The truth of BEM is not truth deriving from some unquestioned source, or from any one Christian tradition, but truth which the churches themselves are willing to recognize as apostolic truth reflecting the faith of the Church of all ages under the assumption that the Holy Spirit is missing neither from any of the great moments of Christian history nor from any of the churches of the fellowship today. The process of reception involves what George Florovsky liked to call "ecumenism in time," not an all or nothing attitude of dialogical agreement in the light of the crystallized traditions of the churches today, but a circular process of listening to one another and of listening together to the common heritage of the apostolic faith.⁷ A critical reaction to BEM is not merely saying yes or no to this or that part of BEM but above all entering by means of BEM into a deeper dialogue within the fellowship of churches, giving serious alternatives to the positions of BEM and being willing to exercise self-criticism toward renewal for the sake of the goal of unity. The cutting edge of BEM's witness is less at the point of any of its theological insights and tactical suggestions, all of which can be reformulated in the future as the churches see fit, but more at the point of testing the maturity of the churches as they seek to advance toward unity in the presence of Christ. The burden of BEM lies paradoxically not on itself but on the churches as they are willing or not to develop gradually a true consensus through the long "spiritual process of reception" involving "prayer and meditation, with penitence, thanksgiving, joy and hope."⁸ The spiritual challenge of BEM for all churches is summed up by an invitation to "a genuine ecumenical conversion,"⁹ which would serve as the indispensable, renewed spiritual basis of the fellowship of churches seeking unity in Christ.

Are the Orthodox Churches ready to meet the spiritual challenge of the Lima text? Are we spiritually ready to begin to respond constructively to theological and ecclesial issues of tremendous ecumenical implications? Are we ready to begin to contemplate future ecumenical commitments suggested by the BEM document, as for example the

⁷ See Anton Houtepen, "Reception, Tradition, Communion," *Ecumenical Perspectives*, pp. 145-47

⁸ *Gathered for Life*, pp. 47-48

⁹ Max Thurian and Gunther Gassmann, "The Faith and Order Document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," *Information. Faith and Order*, February 1985, p. 2.

mutual recognition of sacraments, which are of the greatest magnitude for the unity of the divided churches? To begin to deal seriously with these issues is above all a spiritual matter requiring spiritual readiness! By spiritual readiness I mean being alive to the presence of the Spirit, “not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor 2.13), and interpreting truths with “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2.16). To answer these questions yes or no would be presumptuous and unhelpful. Most important is the fact that the Lima text is a concrete ecumenical challenge calling the Orthodox to discern our own spiritual readiness by prayer, study, reflection and self-criticism in order that the Spirit of God may lead us to witness to the fulness of faith and life in Christ. Nicholas Lossky has succinctly described what the spiritual challenge of BEM means for the Orthodox in the first place by using the word *metanoia*/repentance, defining it as a permanent attitude of submission of the human will to the divine. The BEM document forcefully reminds the Orthodox Church, so Lossky puts it, of its vocation of permanent conversion to Orthodoxy truly understood as the fulness of the life in Christ.¹⁰ Authenticity in the fulness of the life in Christ is the indispensable convincing base for any other theological or ecclesial claims within an ecumenical fellowship.

One specific way in which the Orthodox ecumenical commitment will be tested is by the Orthodox readiness to use the Lima text as a study text at various levels and among various groupings in the life of the Church. Reflecting decades of ecumenical experience the BEM document clearly recognizes that the weight of church unity must rest not on a theological “convergence” by theologians and church representatives alone, but on a true “consensus” developed among all the people of God as well, understood as “that experience of life and articulation of faith necessary to realize and maintain the Church’s visible unity.”¹¹ We must admit that the Orthodox record in this respect is not at all encouraging. Ecumenical involvement has engaged: primarily theologians and hierarchs representing the Orthodox Churches in ecumenical meetings in Geneva or elsewhere; to some degree other Orthodox theologians and hierarchs back home; a few lay persons interested in theology and ecumenical relations; and finally and least of all (in some cases perhaps not at all), the Orthodox faithful. The reasons for this are many, among them administrative and spiritual inertia, and deep questions about the ecumenical movement which have

¹⁰ Nicholas Lossky, “A quelle ‘metanoia’ le texte de Lima appelle-t-il l’Eglise Orthodoxe?” *Unité des Chrétiens*, No 57, January 1985, p 23

¹¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Faith and Order Paper No 111* (Geneva, 1982) p ix

much greater force back home than in ecumenical meetings. But the fact remains that, as in the case of other churches, we face an enormous process of communication, education and motivation.¹² Some Orthodox theological schools have already begun to use the BEM document as a text in appropriate courses. The Orthodox ecumenical commitment will surely appear formal and superficial unless the Orthodox Churches initiate and monitor identifiable ways of ecumenical education at all levels of church life, involving bishops, theologians, lay leaders, teachers, local congregations and even children in their catechetical schools, as the broader context of the reception of BEM. Given the hierarchical nature of the Orthodox Churches, the bishops of our churches must involve ecumenically all their people in appropriate ways, not only for strategic reasons, but also because the truth of all episcopal and ecclesial commitments must ultimately be accepted by the living experience and the conscience of the people of God.¹³

Another way in which the BEM document will test the spiritual maturity and the ecumenical commitment of the Orthodox Churches will be in our willingness to review and correct actual practices which do not reflect the fulness of faith and life in Christ. One of the key stipulations of the presentation of BEM to the churches by Faith and Order is "the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness."¹⁴ BEM is not only an excellent educational text on such matters as the meaning of baptism, the social implications of the eucharist, the spirit of church leadership and many others, but BEM also challenges the churches to deal with lax or even erroneous practices and attitudes perpetuated by uncritical tradition. An early report on BEM by the Orthodox Theological Society in America,¹⁵ which is both positive and reserved in spirit, candidly points out several examples of such practices in the Orthodox Churches. One example is what BEM calls indiscriminate infant baptism, that is, baptism without effective nurturing of parents and baptized children to mature commitment to Christ. The Orthodox report from the United States tersely admits: "This criticism is valid."¹⁶ It goes on to state that "in some practices and attitudes we

¹²See also Jeffrey Gros, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," *One World*, 103 (March 1985) 14.

¹³See Kallistos Ware, "The Ecumenical Councils and the Conscience of the Church," *Kanon· Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für das Recht der Ostkirchen* (Vienna, 1974), 2, especially pp. 22ff.

¹⁴*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, p. x.

¹⁵"A Report on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 29 (1984) 401-18.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 406

Orthodox have fallen short of providing [an] ‘environment of witness and service’ (BEM phraseology), and that we must develop a baptismal catechesis in the life of the Church, especially for parents and sponsors, as a basis for effective Christian nurturing of those who are baptized as infants.’¹⁷ Other examples cited by the same report include passive formalism in worship, an individualistic approach to Holy Communion, the diminishment of the diaconate including the extinction of the office of deaconess, and autocratic clerical authority, all of which cannot stand comfortably under the searching light of BEM seeking to witness to the fulness of the apostolic life.

Thus the spiritual challenge of BEM at its deepest level provides an opportunity for the Orthodox Churches to embark upon a deliberate course of self-renewal, led by the bishops, and consciously aiming at a recovery of the fulness of *orthopraxia*, as well as *orthodoxy*. Otherwise the arduous ecumenical efforts of the Orthodox Churches will not yield abundant fruit to the glory of Christ. The truth of the Orthodox witness, as hinted above, is to be convincingly conveyed not only through symposia, theological literature, and ecumenical encounters, but also through evidence of new life in Christ, sacrificial service to the needy in the world, and genuine Christian fellowship so that others may see and be persuaded by, and not merely told about, the quality of Orthodox faith and life. BEM, as has been stated, has to do with life, and not only with theological agreements or ecclesiastical arrangements. Integral to the reception process of BEM is a process of spiritual renewal within the churches. Giving evidence of the lively presence of the Spirit among us, such renewal would also establish the necessary groundwork for engagement with the difficult theological and ecclesial issues that we face.

Theological Challenge

In the report “Taking Steps Toward Unity” the Vancouver Assembly (1983) proclaimed that “*what* the churches are asked to receive in this text [BEM] is not simply a document, but *in* this document the apostolic faith from which it comes, and to which it bears witness” (emphasis is the report’s).¹⁸ These weighty words sum up the theological challenge of the Lima text for all the churches: to work toward unity by arriving at a common understanding of the central sacraments of ecclesial life, namely, baptism, eucharist and ordained ministry, on the basis of the *apostolic faith*. The BEM document itself

¹⁷Ibid , p 407 See also Thomas Hopko, “The Lima Statement and the Orthodox,” *The Search for Visible Unity*, ed. Jeffrey Gros (New York, 1984), especially pp 60-63, where Hopko writes about BEM’s “judgment on the Orthodox ”

¹⁸Gathered for Life, p 48

appeals to the apostolic faith, the apostolic tradition, and the apostolic ministry. BEM is a theological document but does not stand alone in the quest of unity. The churches agreed in Vancouver that a convincing witnessing unity would bear at least three marks not yet fully shared by the divided churches:¹⁹

- 1) reception of BEM looking to mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist and ministry;
- 2) a common understanding of the apostolic faith, with special attention to the Nicene Creed, through the current second great project of the Faith and Order Commission “Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today;”
- 3) and agreement on common ways of decision-making, ways of teaching authoritatively, and ways of corporate sharing and responsibility in the world.

Since Nairobi (1975) the above critical points have emerged as concrete steps which the churches can follow on the way to unity. Granted the seriousness of our will to unity, each church faces the burden of this question: if not these steps, then *what* steps?

As a theological challenge the BEM document does not seek to define the totality of the apostolic faith. It does not even claim to be an exhaustive theological treatment of the sacraments of baptism, eucharist and ministry. Rather its main purpose is to set down the essentials of the meaning, structure and place of these sacraments in ecclesial life in the light of the apostolic faith. A second important purpose is to lift up traditional points of disagreement, for example infant or adult baptism, and to *suggest* ways of overcoming them in the light of the apostolic faith and without illusions as to easy answers. Anyone who has seriously and honestly studied the New Testament and Church history must admit that in these two tasks the BEM document is on the whole eminently successful. BEM represents an amazing and unprecedented theological convergence which, given the spiritual will to unity as the call of Christ, can lead the churches toward a true consensus of faith and life in conjunction with the other desired marks of unity cited above. BEM is not chiseled on granite. Even essential points can be revised according to the mind of the churches. Indeed the whole document can, and most likely will, be reformulated in the long process of reception. But any church that is willing to attribute any serious theological and historical content to the word “apostolic” cannot evade

¹⁹Ibid , p 19

BEM's theological challenge: if not BEM, then *what?*²⁰

Thus the theological challenge of BEM converges on the meaning of the word "apostolic." One of the key ecumenical questions that has emerged from the work of Faith and Order is: what is the fulness of life in Christ according to the apostolic faith and order? The word "apostolic" is a critical reference to the common heritage of the churches. It would be both unwise and unhelpful to seek to define this word prematurely. It is up to the churches themselves, reflecting on the totality of the Christian ecclesial experience in history, to recognize each in its own life and practice, as well as in the life and practice of the other churches, what is truly apostolic.

However, this is not a vague, slippery word devoid of clear dimensions of meaning. For example, Montreal (1963) long ago set down the ecumenical principle of the centrality of the Gospel as inseparable from its reception by tradition: "Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*) testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit" (*Montreal Report*, 2, 45). Similarly the Lima text appeals to the New Testament as well as to the writings of the Fathers (Baptism, 1). Although it does not name or quote any Fathers, its treatment of baptism, eucharist and ministry are anchored on the witness not only of the canonical Scriptures but also of the whole ancient Church. In fact some have expressed a wide opinion that BEM, because of its supposed heavy sacramental theology, primarily challenges those churches which resolutely hold to the supreme authority of Scripture and attach only secondary importance to sacramental life.²¹ But does not the New Testament testify to the importance of baptism (e.g. Rom 6.1-11, despite 1 Cor 1.17) and the eucharist (1 Cor 10.14-22; 11.17-34)? Has not modern scholarship informed us about the fact that the early Church was above all a worshipping Church centered on the eucharist? On the other hand do we not also recognize the supremacy of Scripture in the Church Fathers? Have we not come more and more to acknowledge that apostolic succession must be defined as the continuity of the whole life of the Church bearing testimony to the lordship of Christ by the power of the Spirit? The word "apostolic" is meant precisely to set us on the course of discussing such issues and within such framework in order to arrive at an agreement about the unifying

²⁰Tillard, p. 242, who writes these sobering words BEM "is an arrow at the crossroads Those churches who will not follow the sign will risk either arriving at a dead-end or discovering that they must return to the beginning of the ecumenical journey to see whether there exists another way."

²¹Lukas Vischer, "Unity in Faith," *Ecumenical Perspectives*, pp. 7-8

essentials of the Christian faith, life and order.

What is BEM's theological challenge to the Orthodox Churches? It is interesting first to note that the early patriarchal encyclical on the ecumenical movement actually counted on ecumenical cooperation and fellowship in practical matters and discouraged heavy involvement in doctrinal issues. For example the 1902 Patriarchal and Synodical Encyclical is doubtful about hope any of "union" because:

The Western Church and the Church of the Protestants, . . . having taken their stand as on a base hardened by the passage of time, . . . seem quite disinclined to join on a road to union, such as is pointed out by the evangelical and historical truth; nor do they evince any readiness to do so, except on terms and bases on which the desired dogmatic unity and fellowship is unacceptable to us.²²

The 1920 Patriarchal Encyclical, although replete with strong theological language about the proposed fellowship of churches, is content to suggest many ways of practical and friendly cooperation including "impartial and deeper historical study of doctrinal differences both by *seminaries* and in *books*" (emphasis is the writer's) but is eloquently silent about any face-to-face doctrinal discussions toward unity.²³ Even as late as 1952 another patriarchal encyclical clearly distinguishes between, on the one hand, "the principle aim of the World Council of Churches . . . the cooperation of the Churches on the plane of social and practical issues," and, on the other hand, "the 'Faith and Order' organization [which] still exists as a special Commission of the Council which is occupied exclusively with dogmatic questions."²⁴ The encyclical immediately goes on to warn:

It is meet that any participation by the Orthodox Church in the discussions and operations of this Commission should be avoided, inasmuch as this Commission has for its aim the union (of Churches) by means of dogmatic discussions between delegates of Churches separated from one another by the deepest issues; this should be plainly and categorically stated to the Central Committee of the Council. But it is also necessary that our Orthodox Church should also inform the heterodox about the content of her faith . . . through books written for this special purpose.²⁵

²²*Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, p. 30

²³Ibid., pp. 40-43.

²⁴Ibid., p. 45.

²⁵Ibid.

I offer the above references not to pursue the reasons behind the expressed Orthodox reluctance to discuss doctrinal issues, which reasons probably are in the main the perceived lack of any possibility of any success and the risk of impeding cooperation even on the practical plane, but in order to point out that a fellowship of churches *can* exist and be worthy of its name for the purpose of practical cooperation and service to the world in many and immensely important areas. The Orthodox did not necessarily have to join in the work of Faith and Order or they could have joined only as observers. Yet the underlying desire for unity, the predilection of many Orthodox to discuss theology, as well as changing perceptions about the possibilities of unity have led many Orthodox in the last decades to *insist* that the World Council place theology and issues of unity at the center of its agenda, as we all know. This is entirely consistent with the constitutional basis of the World Council, the Orthodox ecumenical commitment, as well as the spiritual responsibility implied by that commitment. The World Council has fulfilled the request of the Orthodox. But now, if the Orthodox Churches show reluctance in genuine engagement with BEM and other Faith and Order projects, they would seem to be contradicting their own expressed desires. Then the fellowship of churches would have a right to say to us: "We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed (about unity), and you did not mourn" (Mt 11.17)!

However, given the nature of the process of reception, the Orthodox Churches have no theological reason to hesitate in responding to the BEM document but rather they have reason to rejoice because of the opportunity of witnessing to the fulness of their faith and life in Christ. We should be eager in the spirit of Christian humility, and not in the spirit of triumphalism, to help the other churches of the fellowship to understand the full meaning of the word "apostolic." For example a discussion of the Orthodox understanding of sacrament as *mysterion*, which is grounded in the life of the community of faith, which requires a living faith by the participants, and centers on the action of the Holy Spirit rather than human formulae, would help in BEM's efforts to overcome the false dichotomy between word and sacrament and would help relieve Protestant fears of quasi-magical sacramentalism. The eucharist itself is a fervent prayer of the community of faith, celebrating and appropriating the very content of the Gospel through liturgical action, and looking to Christ as the true High Priest who makes himself present in the whole eucharistic event by the power of the Spirit.

Because as Orthodox we feel that we have maintained over the centuries a remarkable consensus in theology, spirituality, moral teaching and ecclesial life, we can welcome BEM's appeal to the witness of the apostolic tradition and seek to support it on a greater scale. But we

will also be challenged in other ways by the BEM document, and especially by the specifics of what is essential to the apostolic tradition. While BEM strives to help the churches establish a theological coherence of faith and life, it also takes a strong position on behalf of the freedom of the churches regarding those things which are not absolutely essential to unity. Unity is not uniformity, so we have agreed. There is proper unity but there is also proper variety. Have not modern biblical and patristic studies shown to us an almost painful degree of development and variety in writings, forms of worship and practices in the ancient Church, a variety that could not be imagined by most theologians only a few generations ago? How the Orthodox react to the principle of variety when concretely applied, and how strongly we will support the effort to transcend the false dichotomies between Scripture and tradition, word and sacrament, clergy and laity, words of institution and epiklesis, and others, will partly depend on our willingness to absorb the results of contemporary biblical and patristic studies which are clearly presupposed by the Lima text.

One case in point is the long-standing controversy over infant and adult baptism (called “believer’s baptism” by BEM with unfortunate connotations for baptized infants who would then seem to have no place in the community of faith). The ancient apostolic tradition witnesses to both practices! Although the practice of infant baptism eventually prevailed, the delay of baptism is also well known at least up to the fifth century. Granted that some of the great Fathers advised against it, and that infant baptism is desirable, but is it also absolutely required from the standpoint of Orthodox theology? Is it a theologically divisive issue? Another far more difficult case in point is that of the forms of the ordained ministry. BEM affirms the priestly, sacramental and constitutive character of the ordained ministry in ecclesial life. It also recommends the three-fold ordained ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon as a welcome sign of unity but recognizes the variety of church order to which the New Testament and early patristic writings witness. *Episkope* is constitutive in the life of the Church but it can be exercised by means of different names and forms. Is the three-fold pattern absolute to unity? Must the ordained leader of a local church, who exercises the ministry of *episkope*, necessarily be called *episkopos*/bishop, rather than, let us say, *proestos*/president or even *poimen*/shepherd/pastor? Would such differences in vocabulary be theologically divisive? These and other similar issues will have to be thoroughly examined and discussed during the period of the reception of BEM in the light of the best historical and theological scholarship. The Orthodox cannot assume *a priori* that, when the ancient Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopian Churches had different biblical canons without for that reason being

divided, every aspect of the apostolic tradition must be repeated in ecclesial life today. For the sake of obeying Christ's call, and helping others also to obey it, not only unity but also legitimate variety must be held as equally important.

Another area in which the Orthodox Churches are challenged by BEM is that of the ethical and social implications of the sacraments (e.g., see Baptism, 10; Eucharist, 20,25; Ministry, 4,34). Vancouver (1983) also insisted that concern about unity and sacraments cannot be separated from concern about peace, justice, working against racism, fighting hunger and the like. The Lima text "has underlined for us that baptism, eucharist and ministry are healing and uniting signs of a Church living and working for a renewed and reconciled humankind."²⁶ A truly eucharistic life-style includes "a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life" (BEM, Eucharist, 20). These are strong words for the Orthodox who are conditioned by their own historical and cultural experience. But Orthodox ecumenical theologians have clearly acknowledged as integral to their own tradition the truth that the Church is the active supporter and defender of suffering humanity in any conditions of suffering on behalf of a loving God.²⁷ It remains a challenge for the Orthodox Churches to apply this truth in appropriate ways according to their particular situations. The Orthodox Churches have every reason to lift up not only the social ethical, but also the personal ethical, implications of the sacraments. Is there to be a new dichotomy between social and personal ethics? Too long Orthodox theologians have been ecumenically silent about grave issues pertaining to personal morality, sexuality and indiscriminate abortion on demand.²⁸ On the way to unity—are we as Orthodox to count the settling of the exact vocabulary of the ordained ministries as more important to God than the resolution of a grave moral problem costing tens of millions of unborn lives annually? Or, according to Orthodox theology, is unity in Christ and the sharing of a common eucharistic table possible among those who hold to diametrically opposite ethical values?

A final theological challenge to the Orthodox Churches arises not from the contents of the BEM document but from what the reception of BEM might mean for the Protestant Churches, especially those deeply impacted by the spirit modern liberalism. Underneath the growing

²⁶Gathered for Life, p 49

²⁷See especially *Martyria/Mission The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today*, ed Ion Bria (Geneva, 1980)

²⁸This writer somewhat naively tried to raise this issue on the floor of the Vancouver Assembly as one worthy of study, and later was privately supported by a few Protestant representatives and Roman Catholic observers, but to no avail

ecumenical trust a deep anxiety smolders among the Orthodox, an anxiety reflecting the doctrinal hesitations of the patriarchal encyclical quoted above, that the Protestant world will not accept and will not be bound by any doctrinal agreements. Thomas Hopko expresses this Orthodox anxiety when he speaks about worries that "each church will interpret BEM in its own way," that "some churches will not treat [BEM] at all seriously because they consider the issues . . . secondary and unimportant," that the Protestant churches "are no longer capable of acting authoritatively as churches," and that "others may treat the whole effort with indifference, cynicism, or outright contempt."²⁹ These fears are not at all unfounded. Even Protestant ecumenical figures not infrequently make statements which are deeply disquieting to Orthodox doctrinal sensitivities. For example, after the celebration of the Lima Liturgy in Vancouver, in which the Orthodox did not receive Holy Communion for known serious theological reasons, a prominent Protestant ecumenical figure was quoted by the Assembly *Canvas* as saying: "At last, praise God, we can accept together the bread and wine, the body and blood, without those dreadful hangups we've had for so long." This ecumenical figure was obviously speaking about Protestants, but describing theological differences not permitting the sharing of the cup as "dreadful hangups" was not at all reassuring to Orthodox about Protestant seriousness over doctrinal issues. The seeming inertia of the Orthodox Churches in responding to BEM and initiating a process of reception among the Orthodox people is in part preconditioned by this sense of helplessness regarding the value of theological agreements in the face of Protestant freedom of opinion. In the ecumenical journey the Orthodox are likely both to appreciate and to engage more and more in practical ecumenism . . . but can the mainline Protestants ever do the same in doctrinal ecumenism on the basis of classic biblical and patristic categories of faith and life? One can be sure that the Orthodox in the coming years will be watching Protestant reactions not only to BEM but also, and perhaps with greater interest, the parallel project of Faith and Order "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today."

The Ecclesiological Challenge

The ecclesiological challenge is equally sensitive and difficult. BEM's ultimate purpose is the mutual recognition of sacraments by the churches. Even now BEM gently encourages churches "to attain a greater measure of eucharistic communion" (BEM, Eucharist 33). Although it speaks about "the Church," "the apostolic Church," and

²⁹Hopko, pp. 56-57

"the Church of every time and place," the Lima text does not explicitly deal with the doctrine of the Church. Therefore it leaves itself open to the criticism that the sacraments in BEM seem to be unrelated to one another and seem somehow to stand in mid-air. One Orthodox theologian expressed his concern about the precedence of the Church with this oral declaration in Vancouver: "Not where *sacraments* are, there also is the Church, but rather where the *Church* is, there also are sacraments."

But it would be entirely unfair to expect BEM to begin with the ecclesiological problem. This problem can be addressed directly, at any rate for the Orthodox, only when the process of the reception of BEM matures and when the eventual process of reception of a common expression of faith is also completed. A common confession of faith is a prerequisite to the full reception of BEM and to agreement on any other particular issues of ecclesiological nature. Meanwhile we must rest on the principle that the only doctrinal criterion for joining the World Council of Churches is its trinitarian basis. Toronto (1950) affirmed that membership does not imply surrender of a church's ecclesiology, nor acceptance of that of another. The World Council, as it often repeats to minimize confusion on this matter, has no ecclesial status or ecclesial authority of its own.

But of course that is not the whole story. A deep ecclesiological tension exists in the World Council of Churches, and is inevitably carried by BEM as a document of the World Council. This tension, which is felt most sharply by the Orthodox Churches, is in part intrinsic to the ecumenical venture and will not be resolved until the ecumenical journey reaches its goal. But the tension can be discussed, clarified and appropriately treated so as to remain a creative tension prompting the churches toward unity rather than a negative one generating unnecessary frustration. This tension is between, on the one hand, the *implied* ecclesiology of the World Council of Churches and BEM which is so loud, and, on the other hand, the *explicit* ecclesiology of the Orthodox Churches constituting the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church which is so silent in the ecumenical arena. The fruits of this tension are misunderstanding and impatience for many Protestants and frustration and disillusionment for many Orthodox. Whatever the growing trust among ecumenical theologians and church representatives, the Orthodox Churches as churches will not be able to take the World Council seriously as *their* Council and BEM as *their* document, until the unnecessary and negative side of this tension is relieved, which is a responsibility of both the Orthodox Churches and the Council. Because this ecclesiological problem is one of the crucial factors determining the reception of BEM by the Orthodox Churches, it is necessary to deal

with it in the last section of this paper.

The entire family of canonical Orthodox Churches has not slackened but rather increased in recent years its ecumenical commitment to the quest for Christian unity through participation in the World Council of Churches and in bilateral dialogues. One might venture to say that Orthodox ecumenical involvement will continue on a more effective basis as Orthodox ecumenical participation matures and as the Orthodox people, clergy and laity, are appropriately informed about the true bases and goals of Orthodox ecumenism in all its forms. The Orthodox Churches owe an immense gratitude in particular to the World Council of Churches not only for innumerable spiritual, educational and material benefits but also for the Council's conscious or unconscious help in bringing the Orthodox Churches into the world context of the twentieth century as living rather than ancient churches. Not least of all the World Council has also helped in generating greater interaction among the Orthodox Churches themselves in our century. Notwithstanding these and many other benefits, the Orthodox Churches are deeply committed to the World Council of Churches for spiritual and theological reasons: 1) the call to fulfill Christ's will for unity; 2) the imperative of witnessing to the faith and order of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church; and 3) the urgent mandate of Christian cooperation in practical matters, common witness and service to the world. Whatever the obstacles, the Orthodox Churches cannot cease ecumenical engagement and remain true to their own mission in the world. Christ requires it. The very nature of the Church requires it. Christian love and truth require it. The needs of the world require it.

And yet, as we know, the Orthodox Churches have been experiencing an ecclesiological "discomfort" of considerable magnitude within the World Council of Churches (as have other churches for their own reasons). On a corporate level this sense of discomfort, at times perhaps suffocation, broke out through *The Sofia Consultation*,³⁰ an aggressive, even strident voicing of Orthodox feelings about the nature of Orthodox involvement in the World Council of Churches. Whatever the right or wrong claims of *The Sofia Consultation*, the discomfort must be effectively addressed. It was again felt in Vancouver (1983) on several occasions, especially when an issue of clear Orthodox interest was raised on the Assembly floor and unwisely brought to a vote, and then of course the Orthodox were simply overwhelmed by the Protestant majority. This was not merely defeat: this was humiliation, unintended and momentary as it was. A similar painful moment on a personal level,

³⁰ *The Sofia Consultation. Orthodox Involvement in the World Council of Churches*, ed Todor Sabev (Geneva, 1982)

if the writer is allowed a brief reference to his personal experience in Vancouver, occurred during the Lima Eucharist which was otherwise for him an impressive and inspiring event. At the time of Holy Communion, he was compelled, because the rows of chairs were so close together, to follow the immediate participants, and then to come before one of the many Communion Cups along the aisles, and thus having to *reject the Cup* according to his conscience—a personal moment of unprecedented pain and humiliation. Of course this “judgment” of conscience by compulsion was unintended but apparently those responsible for the arrangement of the reception of Holy Communion, although the worship committee included Orthodox, forgot all the hundreds of Orthodox Christians present and their own deep sensitivities pertaining to Holy Communion. In their enthusiasm the Protestants in many ways wanted to involve the Orthodox in the celebration of the Lima Eucharist without, of course, compelling them to receive Holy Communion. While some Orthodox did not seem to mind participating officially in the service, of course not taking Holy Communion, others were deeply disquieted by it and viewed the Protestant warm hospitality in this case as an expression of an embrace of overbearing love.

I mention all of the above with the conviction that, as a matter of sensitive ecumenical policy and courtesy, such things should not occur—and that includes some of the words and part of the spirit of *The Sofia Consultation*, too. My point is that the unnecessary and unhelpful part of the tension can be relieved only by finding a sensitive balance in the relationship between the Orthodox Churches and the World Council without compromising the integrity and the rights of either. When I speak of balance I mean that the Orthodox Churches are within the Council but also outside of the Council constituting one Orthodox Church in a unique way not applicable to other member churches. The memorandum from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in *The Sofia Consultation* clearly states: ‘The Orthodox Church is not the same as its other member churches and that local Orthodox Churches cannot be considered and treated simply as ‘ecclesiastical bodies.’’³¹ Without such a balance the Orthodox Churches will continue to feel at best as “guests” within the massive fellowship of churches and at worst as “co-opted” in various ways by it. It is not a question of dominance and control but a question of Christian love and freedom on both sides for the sake of authentic ecumenical engagement. The finding of this balance is the responsibility not only of the World Council but of the Orthodox Churches themselves truly working together as one Orthodox Church.

I want to make clear that I am not suggesting that the basic problem

³¹Ibid., p. 69

is simply administrative. It is rather ecclesiological. The overwhelming tone, literature and vision of the World Council as a “conciliar fellowship” both presupposes and seeks to give practical expression to a Protestant ecclesiology, one that simultaneously holds to the historical divisions and also the spiritual unity of all the Christian churches. Since all churches somehow share an essential unity in Christ, what remains is to *manifest this unity* more fully and visibly through theological agreement, practical cooperation, common witness and a consensus of faith and life among the churches that would lead to the desired common cup. Some of these ideas, at least in limited ways, are correct from the perspective of Orthodox theology because all the churches confess the Triune God and seek sincerely to serve him in spirit and truth. We must also recognize the right of Protestant member churches to voice such an ecclesiology within the World Council and to act with one another in ways that are appropriate to this ecclesiology. But the World Council *as a council* must not allow—and this is the crux of the problem—Protestant ecclesiology to dominate its spirit and documents, especially significant documents such as BEM, because as a matter of course and to an inverse degree the ecclesial witness of the Orthodox Churches being the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is silenced.³² Whether implicitly or explicitly both types of ecclesiology must be given attention and must be brought into positive dialogue in appropriate ways especially in key documents.

A subtle but powerful indication of the implicit dominance of Protestant ecclesiology, to give another example, may be discerned in the more or less official World Council terminology which applies the expression “the Church” (with capital “C”) to the assumed larger reality of the invisible Church somehow already existing and to be more fully manifested in the future, while the expression “the churches” (with small “c”) is applied to the divided Christian bodies, including the Orthodox Churches. That these expressions are more than stylistic matters is indicated by another equally subtle but powerful tendency in ecumenical language to refer to the Orthodox reality by means of the plural “Orthodox churches” rather than the singular “Orthodox Church” with obvious, if unconscious implications. In other words Protestant ecclesiology is so deeply assumed and so overwhelmingly prevalent in the tone and literature of the World Council that to many Protestants, in many cases because of unfamiliarity pertaining to the historic position

³²Thus in the context of responding to BEM the Orthodox Theological Society in America finds it necessary to explicate that “the Church of Christ, in its fulness, is not merely a spiritual reality reflected in a host of the Christian communities with differing confessions and liturgical practices. Rather, she is a concrete historical reality that we understand to be the Holy Orthodox Church,” p. 401

of the Orthodox Church, authentic Orthodox ecclesiological statements smack of "ecclesiological triumphalism," "theological imperialism," or a "theology of glory," unworthy of the Lord who washed his disciples' feet and offered himself on the cross for the life of the world. Thus in spite of the Toronto principle, and in spite of the clear principles of Orthodox ecumenism, the Orthodox Churches are placed by force of uncritical circumstances in a defensive position and our representatives are time and again pressured to surrender explicit expressions of their own ecclesiology by reason of the prevailing ecumenical dynamics.

Unfortunately we Orthodox representatives involved in the ecumenical movement not only have yielded to this pressure, undoubtedly not to risk raising extremely sensitive issues, but also have at times served as unwitting promoters of this assumed and prevalent ecclesiology. To give an example from a statement by Orthodox theologians drafted at the "Consultation on the Church's Struggle for Justice and Unity" in Crete (1975):

. . . all should strive in their churches [note small "c"] and traditions to deepen the fulness of the apostolic faith embodied in a fully ecclesial life . . . No church is therefore required to lose its distinctive character . . . The unity of the Church [note capital "C"] should be understood as common participation in the true Tradition . . . given by Christ . . . a unity which increases . . . a dynamic process . . . towards the perfect unity which will only be revealed at the end of time . . .³³

The above statement is tantalizingly ambiguous confusing two kinds of unity by means of theological "ecumenese." It is true insofar as a *spiritual unity* of hearts and minds is concerned, a unity that can wane and wax, a unity that should be pursued among the Orthodox themselves. But it is not true insofar as the *ecclesial unity* of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is concerned, identified by objective doctrinal, sacramental and canonical boundaries, whatever the spiritual shortcomings of its diverse members.

Still more unfortunate are occasional liturgical instances in which Orthodox hierarchs and theologians seem to cross over proper guidelines of ecumenical worship. Yes, we are committed to ecumenical prayer

³³ *Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, p. 117 The above words are quoted from several paragraphs in the original For another example of ecumenical ecclesiological ecumenese hesitating to identify the Orthodox Church as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, see the Damascus Statement in preparation for the Vancouver Assembly (1983) in *Jesus Christ—the Life of the World*, ed Ion Bria (Geneva, 1982) pp 12-14

and ecumenical prayer services. Prayer gives us spiritual unity by the grace of God. Prayer is essential to our quest for ecclesial unity. But what happened in Vancouver at the Lima Eucharist, so at least this writer would strongly counsel, should not again occur. At the Lima Eucharist Orthodox hierarchs and priests officially participated in the great liturgical entrance, proceeded up into the area of liturgical action, recited liturgical prayers, read biblical readings, and then stepped down from that area in order not to take part in the eucharist proper and, of course, not to receive Holy Communion. But can the eucharist be divided in that fashion? Does not BEM itself instruct us that "the whole action of the eucharist has an 'epikletic' character" (BEM, Eucharist, 16)? Is not the whole eucharist one sacramental event? Did not participation in the Lima Eucharist blur, where it should have made clear by means of painful regrets, authentic witness to Orthodox ecclesiology on the part of the Orthodox themselves? To this writer, the act of "stepping down" at a crucial point in the Lima Eucharist seemed not only superficial but actually more offensive than official non-participation would have been. I also had mixed feelings about the Orthodox Liturgy as an ecumenical event, which was impressively celebrated amidst a throng of Protestants and Orthodox. Not only were the Orthodox cast in the role of being "observed" by the Protestants, but also some Protestants were pained and offended by not being able to receive Holy Communion. For all these reasons, I do not think that it is helpful to celebrate eucharists in such ecumenical contexts where some would receive Communion and others would not.

Therefore the Toronto statement and other basic ecumenical principles now and then clarified by the World Council do not of themselves relieve the ecclesiological confusion as far as the Orthodox are concerned, although the frequent articulation of these basic principles is a necessary reminder about the true nature of the World Council and the Orthodox Church. In addition careful steps must be taken in order to clear up this ecclesiological confusion which fundamentally weakens the Orthodox ecumenical involvement by blurring the authenticity of the Orthodox witness. The Orthodox Churches have sufficiently matured in the ways of ecumenism within the World Council to pursue these steps in a proper spirit and with proper leadership, steps which may initially appear challenging to the fellowship of churches but will in the long run strengthen it by means of genuine theological dialogue on the basis of the true positions of the member churches. What are, then, some of these steps?

The first step, as many Orthodox theologians have already suggested, is a more essential qualitative and quantitative participation in the work of the World Council, i.e., an actualization of the Orthodox

presence applying across the board and involving administration, finances, policies, commissions and programs. The twenty-three percent quota system for Orthodox representation is not of itself the answer, and Orthodox insistence on it would seem to make us both tiresome and impinging on the rights of other churches. A key structural answer is needed by which the Orthodox Churches can work as one Orthodox Church with respect to the World Council, without necessarily ceasing individual membership. Just because all the Orthodox Churches entered into the World Council individually, the future nature of their involvement and membership does not have to remain unchanged. Perhaps the establishment of a Pan-Orthodox Ecumenical Commission with a permanent office at the Patriarchal Orthodox Center in Geneva, coordinating Orthodox ecumenical priorities and strategies, could be a first move toward finding the right answer *within* the World Council. Perhaps a balanced answer may not be found until the Roman Catholic Church itself is engaged in this discussion in the hope of also joining the World Council. In any case it is imperative that the Orthodox Churches, along with the right of their individual membership in the World Council, should find ways of representing themselves and acting as one Orthodox Church within the Council, if their ecclesiological witness is to bear weight.

A second step is a more clear explication of Orthodox ecclesiology in an ecumenical context which would do justice both to authentic Orthodox ecclesiology and to the deep Orthodox commitment to contemporary ecumenism renouncing superficial triumphalism and traditional polemics. This task belongs primarily to Orthodox leaders and theologians themselves. Much has already been done in the area of eucharistic ecclesiology. Now there is a need for a clear articulation of the value of *canonical unity* as a sign of ecclesial unity from an Orthodox perspective. The ecclesial unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church has never been lost but endures in the ongoing history of the family of canonical Orthodox Churches. Orthodox ecclesiology holds to the principle that ecclesial unity can neither be historically existent nor theologically conceived except as a full communion of a family of churches united doctrinally, sacramentally and *canonically*. The reading of the diptychs is not merely a formal but rather an essential sign of ecclesial unity. Canonicity is not only a legal but also theological notion expressing a mutual sharing of the catholicity of the Church as an ongoing historical reality. To ignore or be silent about the fact that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church has a street address dismays the Orthodox, especially the Orthodox back home, and serves no purpose as far as an ultimate solution to the ecclesiological problem of the World Council of Churches is concerned.

A third step is the involvement of a more clear and properly balanced ecclesiological phraseology in all World Council affairs and documents in order to maintain the integrity of Orthodox ecclesiology while neither slighting other member churches nor suggesting necessary compliance by them to Orthodox ecclesiological principles, unless of course they become freely and inwardly convinced of the truth of these principles. The quality and timing of Orthodox initiatives in this regard are, to be sure, extremely sensitive matters. Superficial triumphalism is entirely out of bounds, one might even say, reprehensible to a true ecumenical spirit. The Christian principles of love and freedom do not allow even hints of demands of capitulation on any points but only genuine dialogue in mutual trust and respect with a prayerful seeking to persuade each other openly and without defensive attitudes about the truth of the distinctive positions of the member churches—in order that Christ himself may convert us to the one Truth.

But the ecclesiological problem cannot be silenced or confused without doing a disservice to true ecumenism within the World Council or other councils of churches throughout the world. How the ecclesiological problem is to be elucidated is the responsibility of all the member churches. The Orthodox should not again request the issuance of separate statements but rather seek a clearer ecclesiological phraseology and economically formulated expression of their distinctive ecclesiological and doctrinal views on key issues whenever these are treated in ecumenical documents. At the same time it should be made clear that the Orthodox are not in the World Council only to witness to the Orthodox faith but also to share in a common witness and to learn from other Christians as well. Thus, while the dynamic process of spiritual unity among the member churches toward a more perfect unity may be recognized, and while the truth that the Orthodox Churches, too, need to live the fulness of the apostolic life by ongoing spiritual renewal may also be affirmed, nevertheless the ecclesial self-understanding of the Orthodox Church that it is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church need not be held under a bushel but rather be humbly proclaimed as part of an ecumenism of truth in love. Too, this claim is a terrible burden on the family of Orthodox Churches to manifest convincingly their ecclesial unity in their mutual relations and common witness.

A fourth and final step in dealing with the ecclesiological problem is a courageous exploration on the part of the Orthodox pertaining to the ecclesial status not of the World Council as a Council, but of the member churches, i.e., an effort to articulate in what positive sense, wherever possible, a member church possesses ecclesial reality no matter how provisional or incomplete that reality is. That the Orthodox

Church is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church does not at imply that other Christian churches are nothing. Is acceptance of the trinitarian basis of the World Council an ecclesial sign in terms of doctrine? Is acceptance of the Lima text an ecclesial sign in terms of the sacraments? Are living faith in Christ, vigorous worship and true preaching of the Gospel by the power of the Spirit ecclesial signs? Are selfless love, effective mission and sacrificial service to the world in the name of Christ ecclesial signs? Yes, by all means!

Traditionally the Orthodox Churches have not developed positive means of relating to other Christian bodies but rather have looked upon them in the categories of schism and heresy which could be healed only by repentance and return to the Orthodox Church. But these categories are wholly inappropriate in the context of the World Council of Churches involving historic Protestant Churches with centuries of tradition, teaching and witness, and which were never related to the Orthodox Church. Wholesale renunciation of their tradition and massive capitulation to contemporary Orthodoxy would be as unrealistic as it would be wrong. The Orthodox need to realize that this avenue to Christian unity is closed. Rather the Orthodox need to accept the necessity of a long period of growth in a spiritual unity of hearts and minds through authentic dialogue and cooperation, and of witnessing to the key signs of the fulness of apostolic faith and order, while fervently praying for a day when by God's grace other churches may become ready to consider and to discuss communion with the family of Orthodox Churches without surrendering their autonomy. Meanwhile the Orthodox leaders and theologians need gradually to express themselves on the ecclesial status of other churches in the spirit of Vatican II or at least on the fundamental signs of ecclesial reality in any separated church, if the Orthodox ecumenical commitment is to have deep value, and if the Orthodox witness to the fulness of the apostolic faith, life and order is to carry ringing conviction.



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